from political self-representation.

Developing the practice of interventionist art also requires more than the mere ideological content, of course. Questions of form are involved - the place of realist artistic representation continues to be troublesome as well as the context of artistic production and the relation of artist to audience. With respect to the last, in particular, the approaches taken by contributors vary widely.

Thus, in a populist vein, Peter Bunn and Lorraine Lessen describe their evolution from art school radicals to image-makers for the Docklands steering committee which decides on the issues, strategies and priorities of struggle. Visual artist Hans Haacke, on the other hand, presents himself as a one man flying squad, researching the cities where exhibitions are held in order to identify issues and symbols that make local sense. (In Montreal, he placed posters for Alcan-sponsored operas, a mosque portrait of Stalin's sister, and velvet text on summarizing Alcan's South African activities in honeyed aluminium window frames.) A different journey is described by muralist Judy Baca's, whose sponsorship of monumental works, ultimately employing hundreds of workers, meant combining the roles of fundraiser and administrator, bridging between the Los Angeles street scene and City Hall. In the end, saving herself from burn-out required recognizing that her own design talents and responsibility placed her authentically in a position of leadership, a position that broke both feminine gender and Chicano culture norms.

In situations of struggle, other contributors note, collective participation in the creation of culture breaks down distinctions between artist and audience, creating and unleashing community power. In Uruguay, women sing in prisons to create communities of resistance. In California, Sweet Honey in the Rock, a black woman's apella group, sings to cross boundaries between black and lesbian separatist cultural networks. In Kenya, villagers create national identities in theatrical performance. In Jamaica, Sistren, a women's theatre troupe, empowers women to name their own reality.

While a strategy of naming does not in itself constitute an aesthetic, the popular participation it entails tends to discourage formal experimentation as a supreme value. Independently of that, the (much maligned) social realist tradition has continued to be influential - for example, as Martha Gever notes, in the making of early feminin videos. On the other hand, femininity in particular has eschewed any single approach, as is documented in Arlene Raven's description of the work of Los Angeles lesbian artists which draw on everything from archaic ritual magic to the latest techniques in photo collage and neon sculpture. Perhaps the best discussion of the Situationalist International available in English, Tom Ward makes a strong case for surrealist duration of aquatic (un)consciousness to see, and name, the failures of capitalist abundance.

Finally, there is the problem of distribution: how, in a market society, actually to get radical art out to its intended audience. Communication satellites, cable and free radio provide space on the air waves. Photographer Fred Landon is the next in his series of working with unions. Klaus Staeck sells posters of his photomontages to German political groups. Lucy Lippard breaks the convention of the detail art critic to help artists and activists communicate. But the strategies that delight are those that turn the media against themselves. Suzanne Laity and Lella Libowsit offer guidelines to get feminist political performances covered on that cover-up-firm, the news. And Peter King's manual of how the Australian Billboard Utilizing Graffitiists Against Unhealthy Promotions BUGA UP billboards makes my finger itch for a can of spray paint.


Peter McLaren established his reputation as an important figure in radical education theory with Cribs from the Corridor, a work in which the brutal and degrading aspects of the Canadian inner-city schooling system were revealed in graphic and often disturbing detail. McLaren's ongoing concerns with the development of an emancipatory pedagogy are now the focus of a second book, and though this is a more densely written and theory-laden text than his first work, it shows clearly that McLaren remains a perceptive ethnographer of the educational setting.

Schooling as a Ritual Performance is based on the author's fieldwork at a Toronto Catholic junior high school purposed to be the toughest in the city. It is also a school where the majority of the students are the sons and daughters of largely working-class, immigrant Portuguese and Italian parents. McLaren's purpose in this book is to offer a critique of the ideological presuppositions of contemporary education, a purpose which leads him to investigate the processes by which political indoctrination is interwoven throughout the curriculum of time and space.

This is an ambition he sustains with considerable success throughout the text. The most innovative feature of McLaren's approach is the framework of his analysis, the field of ritual studies, or ritualology, an emerging perspective which still bears the traces of that finds its chief force of influence. Because ritualology is now crystallizing around a core of proach anthropology, application promises as many pitfalls as it does advantages.

To the extent that McLaren is concerned with Ritual Performance generates a number of important insights through its ritual studies perspective, the book is occasionally hampered by the ill-defined nature of its methodological framework. The very notion of ritual, for example, is notoriously polysemic, and McLaren is forced to pursue his discussion at a fairly high level of abstraction. Consequently, at times the book's theory is overwhelming rather than illuminating, for the territo ry McLaren has staked out for analysis becomes rather densely populated with features, theories, and definitions. Of course, it should be pointed out that an absence of clear and definite boundaries is hardly surprising in a work that finds its chief force of influence coming from an array of scholars and disciplinary approaches, anthropology, sociology, education, religious studies, and dramaturgy are but a few of the established fields claimed in this work. Thus, McLaren is an eclecticism, McLaren is impressed in his capacity to move with relative ease between disparate and often competing schools of thought.

McLaren's investigation of the ritual dimensions of education is structured around an analysis of the intersection of four social and symbolically constructed "states": the street corner state; the student state; the sanctity state; and the home state. Each state is composed of particular rituals, and these ritual complexes are themselves embedded in the social
matrix of the surrounding economic and political environment. Teachers are constituted from specific interactive modes: the street-corner state, for example, frequently turns on the expression of resistance, while the student state is directed by a monologic, regimented code of behaviour that is not to tolerate the subversion. The relationship between a given state and the students who participate in its expression is clearly dialectical: To the extent that a particular interactive mode defines the nature of the students’ actions, too do the students themselves construct the particular state.

The meaning of a ritual is only realized in the fact of its performance, a relationship McLaren defines as "bi-directionality." By engaging in ritual, the performer is made a part of the social order even as participation establishes that order. For McLaren, this is what it means that as students participate in the rituals of schooling, they also embody the cultural symbols that connect them to those ritual forms. Hence engagement in ritual, he says, is an assertion of political power (p. 131).

What this argument makes apparent is that education can be a site of the reproduction of oppression, a conclusion to which McLaren finds his research continually draws him. Teaching, he tells us, is a practice by which students are systematically disempowered. Students with working-class backgrounds in particular lose on both counts. Not only does the education they receive prevent them from fully developing their potentials, it also prepares them for the low-paying jobs society sets aside for them. As McLaren sees it, the failure that awaits so many working-class youngsters in traditional schooling is "a crucial factor in the maintenance and evolution of the social order" (p. 173). A religious school fares no better, he says, because "the effects of Catholic schooling in helping the poor and oppressed are invisibly linked to a culture of domination and exploitation" (p. 184).

McLaren’s analysis concludes with a short offering of general recommendations. He argues that teachers should learn to develop sensitivity to the rituals that define the practice of teaching, and once they understand that teaching is comprised of an ensemble of cultural symbols and ritual behaviours, they must discover ways of “ritualizing” the education setting. In other words, teachers must learn how to rehearse the classroom rituals in ways that neutralize the implicit messages by which students learn to accept oppressive societal values. As McLaren sees it, “the teacher, as a prescriber of arbitrary meanings and guardian of the hegemonic boundaries of knowledge, assumes the position of affirming, and to a lesser extent manufacturing, the dominant cultural forms of the social order” (p. 222). This is a role desperately in need of transformation. Yet exercising teachers to step outside the referential frame by which a society defines what an educator’s role should be is to suggest that teachers disengage themselves from their culture in order to reform their social roles. This raises troublesome philosophical and practical concerns, however, for to try and get beyond one’s culture is to entertain the notion that culture itself is a disembodied entity capable of existing independently of human agents. Hence the transformation of the educator’s role can really only be imagined if it proceeds in tandem with other equally radical changes taking place at numerous intersecting levels of society.

Teachers, McLaren says, must become “primal servants” and learn how to draw from their “aboriginal roots.” Moreover, they must abandon the dichotomous root paradigm which sees learning as a formal practice cut off from practical, embodied experience. Learning should transpire in a “felt context” in which participation and performance are recognized as vital ingredients for true understanding. Thus, for example, the arts should be made a central part of the daily curriculum and not merely set aside as recreational interludes. Drama, for instance, could be used as an instructional device in other disciplines like history and literature. If teachers encourage students to realize the connections between artistic expression and the pleasures of “intellectual” achievements, they may also be able to generate the conditions which make learning a truly creative and spontaneous adventure. Hence greater “interdisciplinary collaboration” pertaining directly to the study of educational practices is absolutely crucial.

Hans Barch has said: “Since education is everywhere closely related to the prevailing form of government, its principles cannot be reformed without also changing the constitution of the state.” This is certainly the larger and more pressing issue proponents of an emancipatory pedagogy need to address. Though the question of who will educate the educators is never raised, in “Schooling as a Ritual Performance,” it nevertheless forms the unspoken backdrop against which McLaren’s ideas are thrown into relief. It also constitutes a serious challenge to the kinds of solutions McLaren is presently prepared to suggest.

Still, McLaren’s is a provocative perspective, for "Schooling as a Ritual Performance" can itself be read as a challenge, a challenge to teachers to become political and cultural revolutionaries willing to undertake the deconstruction of a system which functions to maintain existing levels of societal oppression. In his view, “education” and “liberation” must somehow be (re)connected. Students should not be disempowered in the classroom, but given the social and intellectual resources that turn schooling into a process of practical and political enlightenment.

Gary McCarron is a graduate student in Social and Political Thought at York University.